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ABSTRACT

In this paper a relationship is established between writing and early literacy in young children. The age at which early literacy begins to develop in young children varies with each child. For many children, literacy begins to appear in activities such as pretend play, drawing, conversations about storybook plots, and conversations about words or signs or labels. The development of this early literacy is a social process embedded in social relationships, particularly in children's relationships with parents, siblings, friends, caretakers, and teachers. Readiness for school is now regarded as influenced by familial, institutional, and community variables. Between the ages of one and five, children learn to use symbols to create and communicate meaning. These symbols can be used to make up stories, draw images, and later on to write stories. R. Charlesworth (1992) offers extensive suggestions for providing print experiences for children, such as the following: (1) call attention to the conventions of print while writing down children's dictation; (2) point out the uses of print materials (such as phone books, storybooks, shopping lists, greeting cards, menus, and magazines) as children use these materials in dramatic play; and (3) model reading behavior by reading when the children are reading (such as during a library or rest period). J. A. Brewer (1992) suggests that children pass through a number of stages in literacy development, including the scribble stage, the linear repetitive stage; the random letter stage, the letter-name or phonetic stage, the transitional spelling stage, and the conventional spelling stage. Early literacy is believed to contribute to success in learning at each level. (Contains 10 references.) (TB)

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In determining what writing has to do with literacy, it is first necessary to define what literacy is. According to Webster's New World Dictionary, literacy is "the state or quality of being literate; ability to read and write" (1986, p. 825). Another definition of literacy by McLane and McNamee (1990) is knowing the letters of the alphabet and how to use these letters to read and write. McLane and McNamee go on to say that literacy also involves attitudes, assumptions, and expectations about reading and writing, and the place and value of these activities in one's life. It is very interesting that both definitions include reading and writing capabilities in determining literacy. Therefore, writing becomes one vital component of the overall concept of literacy.

Writing and reading clearly depend on each other. The efforts of the writier are always partially directed by the purposes and interests of the reader and a reader's efforts are always partially directed by the purposes and interests of the writer. To succeed in one role requires some understanding of the other (McLane & McNamee, 1990).

Although reading and writing have a definite connection, they are quite distinct pursuits. Writing activities are usually more visible because they involve making something---usually marks on paper or some other writing surface. Reading activities are less visible and often more of an internal mental process. These activities indicate that a child is trying to understand a story through pretend reading, dramamtic play, etc. (McLane &

McNamee, 1980).

The age at which early literacy begins to develop in young children varies with each child. For many children, literacy begins to appear in activities such as pretend play, drawing, conversations aobut storybook plots, and conversations about words on signs or labels. Through these actîvities, young children are trying to understand and make sense of reading and writing long before they can actually read and write. At the same time, they are acquiring a broad range of knowledge, skills, and dispositions related to writing and reading.

The development of this early literacy is a social process embedded in social relationships, particularly in children's relationships with parents, siblings, friends, caretakers, and teachers. Literacy development begins in children's relationships with their immediate caretakers. When this development actually begins varies with the difference in families and communities. Some children have opportunities to observe much more reading and writing going on around them than others do. Some have much more experience interacting with parents and older siblings in activities which involve literacy and, therefore, enter school programs with far more experience with literacy functions and forms than other children. A child who is in an environment for most of his early years without observing reading and/or writing activities is at a disadvantage when it comes time for him/her to enter a school program (Gibson, 1989). In otehr words, a child in an environment where reading

and writing are a way of life and modeled every day is going to be more ready for school.

Readiness for school used to be considered a condition that was primarily a matter of maturity and, therefore, genetically predetermined. The newer theories of learning and development focus on readiness as a condition that now includes environmental and ecological considerations. Readiness is now regarded as a condition that is influenced by familial, institutional, and community variables. The burden of responsibility for a child's readiness now shifts from the child's responsibility to the adult's in the child's life (Kagan, 1992).

Originally, it was thought that first it was appropriate to learn, then perform: in other words, first it was appropriate to learn <u>how</u> to write, then actually write. Although this philosophy may still hold true for some things (for example, first one must learn how to fly a plane before one can actually fly it), it doesn't apply to writing any longer. First, it is important to write, then to learn about writing (Murray, 1993).

A child's first writing may not look much like an adult's idea of writing. Between the ages of one and five, children learn to use symbols to create and communicate meaning. These symbols can be used to make up stories, draw images, and later on to write stories. Young children beginning to write often scribble with the intention for these marks to be writing. As a child's print awareness increases, these scribbles take on the characteristics of typical print (Gibson, 1989).

The process of learning to read and write begins at home long before children enter school. The process varies form child to child, but develops as children gain experience with language and print. Drawing is an integral part of the writing process because it is a way for children to plan and organize their written text. A drawing can tell a story that written words cannot yet convey for the young child. Parents should accept their child's drawings and encourage them to talk about them. Some researchers suggest that parents and teachers write down what children dictate so they can see their own speech put into written words (Dailey, 1991).

If we want our young children to be literate and to become literate adults, parents and caregivers of young children need to make their environment as encouraging as possible. Charlesworth (1992) has some extensive suggestions for print experiences which include the following:

1. Call attention to the conventions of print while writing down children's dictation.
2. Point out the uses of print materials (such as phone books, storybooks, shopping lists, greeting cards, menus, and magazines) as children use these materials in dramatic play.
3. Model reading behavior by reading when the children are reading (such as during a library or rest period).
4. Have children read signs during field trips.
5. Read children's dictation and have them read their dictation.
6. Encourage writing and drawing and label the products.
7. Draw attention to letters in context such as when writing the child's name, labeling a picture, or taking dictation.
8. Provide a variety of writing implements and materials (lined and unlined paper, large and small paper, pens, markers, pencils, chalk and chalkboard, paint and paint brushes).
9. Encourage children to write and accept their products

no matter how distant they are from conventional writing.

10. Provide props and print materials that will stimulate role-playing and story reenactments.
11. Encourage cooperative social interaction during play and during writing activities.
12. Provide moveable letters and encourage experimentation (matching, sorting, sequencing, etc.).
13. Motivate children by encouraging them to write words that are personally important to them (e.g., their own names, names of friends and family members, names of their pets, or favorite play materials).
14. Provide opportunities to write letters, make greeting cards, lists, labels, and captions and to write stories.
15. Call attention to print in familiar stories by pointing to the words as they are read.
16. Write messages to children (e.g., "I like you." "You are a good helper." "Thanks for playing nicely today." "Time to wash your hands").
17. Let the children see adults using written language (making lists, writing captions and notes).
18. Encourage questions and discussion during story reading, especially by relating story content to the children's past experiences.
19. Enlist the aid of parents, volunteers, and older children to be trained as story readers to provide individual story reading time.
20. Develop a parent education program designed to provide parents with techniques for enhancing learning at home.
21. Provide opportunities for and encourage "pretend" reading by modeling easy-to-learn stories, such as are found in predictable books and pattern books.
22. Provide an abundance of reading material including children's literature, wordless picture books, newspapers, telephone books, catalogs, cartoons, menus, coupons, junk mail, and children's magazines."

(p. 413-414)

Parents and teachers are important writing models. Adults involved in writing behaviors such as writing a letter, making a grocery list, or writing a check often stimulate a young child to write. By observing adults writing, children discover ways in which writing is useful and meaningful. Parents can also provide an environment that encourages a young child to write by having many tools for writing and a variety of paper types available. A

typewriter or computer as well as chalk and stencils are all possible materials to promote writing (Dailey, 1991).

A first step in learning to read and write is understanding that print has meaning. Children see adults stopping a car at a stop sign or getting out the flour after referring to a recipe. Encouraging young children to help write lists, notes, letters, books, etc. helps them understand that written messages can be a way of communicating. As children play, they also become more aware of symbols. An example of a symbol could be a child using a block to represent a car while playing. They then learn that symbols are a necessary part of learning to read and write and, for example, making the letters "t-e-l-e-p-h-o-n-e", which are just marks on paper, stand for telephone (Mitchell & David, 1992).

Brewer (1992) gives the various stages of writing in young children as follows:

1. Scribble Stage---In this stage of writing, children scribble before they learn which marks make letters and which do not.
2. Linear Repetitive Stage---In this next stage of writing, children begin to discover that writing is usually horizontal and that letters appear in a row across the page. They begin to look for some connections between words and the objects they represent.
3. Random-Letter Stage---This third stage of writing is when children begin to learn which lines are acceptable as letters and will start to use these letters in some random in order to record words or sentences.
4. Letter-Name Writing or Phonetic Writing---This is the stage of writing during which children begin to associate letters with their sounds. While writing words and sentences, children write words by writing only the letters that they actually hear.
5. Transitional Spelling---In this stage, children begin to spell words in their conventional form, as it really

is spelled and not how it sounds. The example given by Brewer is the word "love". Because young children see this word so often, they begin to spell it the correct way even though the "o" and "e" have different sounds.

6. Conventional Spelling---This final stage of writing, according to Brewer, is when children, after receiving on-going support from adults while learning to write, have learned most of the rules for conventional spelling.

Writing plays a major role in every area of the curriculum throughout every level of education. Using writing to learn allows our children to actively engage in science, social studies, and art through observing, experimenting, reading, and recording data. Writing to learn is the key to explore connections among the different curriculum areas, language arts, and art through the method of integrated curriculum (Atwell, 1990). To help our young children be able to succeed and learn at each level, we must be sure they have ample opportunities to pursue writing at a very early age.

In closing, this writer would like to tell a story that was told to her by a second grade teacher who teaches in a conservative, medium sized midwestern city. This teacher had a boy in her classroom who had a great deal of difficulty with reading, writing sentences, and spelling and had been labeled a slow learner by the time he entered second grade. His handwriting was exceptionally neat---perfect, in fact---but he couldn't think of sentences to write nor was he able to spell any of the words if he did happen to come up with a sentence. He expressed a great deal of frustration throughout these experiences. He also struggled with reading, including even the

most basic of color words or sight words. During one of this teacher's conversations with this boy's mother, this teacher made the comment about how neat his writing was: he worked really hard to make it perfect. His mother's response was, "That's because he was never allowed to scribble with crayons or pencils at all. We wanted him to write neatly, so we didn't let him even use crayons or pencils until the summer before kindergarten." From this conversation, this teacher realized that the boy's frustration could have been avoided had his parents encouraged him to scribble, etc. when he was young...even if it wasn't perfect.

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